



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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and give me part of the day to have him "all to myself," a privilege we both enjoy! If it is "more blessed to give than to receive," it is surely a gift to be able to receive graciously.

In conclusion, let me quote again from that beautiful book, "The Home Life."* "One chief element of the parental art is judicious and timely confidence. The best preparation for the burden and struggle of life is the knowledge, in some wise measure, of what it costs the elders to live, in the highest sense—effort, patience, hope. But even about the lower things of life confidence is not wasted. Boys and girls are content to know their parents manage to live somehow. Their daily bread and pleasures come to them as the sunlight comes; they know nothing of the dust and sweat of the battle that wins them. It is well that as intelligence unfolds, the young people should know something of what the comfort and order of the home costs—something of what the father and mother talk over, with broken voices and clasped hands sometimes, when the children have left them and the cares of the day are done—that they may not think that life is quite a holiday pastime, and may see that the noblest thing man has to do in this world is to toil patiently and suffer bravely, that others may be housed, clothed, fed and trained for God. Why is it children so frequently find it easier to open their hearts to strangers than to those who are set in their homes to be to them in the place of God? Make them your comrades, as Christ made His disciples, opening to them your heart of hearts as their nature unfolds; while at the same time see that you share their sports and pastimes, and keep your interest keen in all their pleasures and pursuits; taking as much of your own boyhood and girlhood as you can on with you through life."

A. F. S.

* "The Home Life," by Baldwin, Brown, Smith, Elder & Co.

ON SELF-CULTURE.

BY J. SAXON MILLS.

THE meaning of the word "self" in the title of my lecture, is, of course, not to be limited to any single one or two of those faculties into which we are accustomed arbitrarily, but conveniently, to divide our human nature. Carlyle has strongly insisted upon the capital error involved in speaking of a man's intellectual nature, and of his moral nature, as if these were divisible and existed apart. Necessities of language, however, as he admits, prescribe such forms of utterance, so that I may divide also the functions of self-culture broadly into those which relate to a man's intellectual, moral or physical nature. Much, indeed, might be said about physical, and still more about moral culture, but here, of course, I can only speak in any way approaching adequacy about one of these great provinces, and I have chosen that of our intellectual culture. One of my chief contentions, however, is that unless intellectual culture conduces to the healthy and effective conduct of life, or in other words, to moral culture, it can be regarded only as an innocent pastime, and scarcely part of a man's serious and imperative duty.

Now, to begin with, what definition of education shall we adopt? Are we to say, as much that passes nowadays for education might justify us in saying, that its main object is to enable us to pay a certain toll, called an examination, which often, without much reference to individual capacity, bars the entrance to many walks of life? or shall we follow a recent writer in one of our great monthlies, who seemed to think education chiefly valuable as a creator and bulwark of social distinctions, so that we may have a kind of aristocracy of opportunity lifted above the mass of self-educated plebeians? Such conceptions, though not unjustified by our existing system, we must of course repudiate, and find some definition, not only scientifically adequate, but helpful to us in the practical pursuit of the object defined. Such a definition has been given once and for all, in English literature, by one who was the type and embodiment of the highest

culture of his day. John Milton, in his tract on education, settles the matter in a few words, which ought to have been the death-blow to all mere pedantry and cram for ever.—“I call therefore, a complete and generous education, that which fits a man to perform justly and skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public of peace and war.” You see how this definition establishes at once the important principle, that we learn not simply to know but to live—*non scholae sed vitae discimus*—and that practical preparation for life in the highest and widest sense of the word, is the true object of all educational effort. “The offices of peace and war” says Milton, meaning that intellectual culture must never be purchased at the price of bodily health and efficiency. How often is it thus purchased in these days of universal examination? How many young men in our Universities have been unfitted for the offices of war, and alas! how many young women for the offices of peace, by that absurd and unnatural evil of over-study!

But to return to our practical question. Let us assume a young man of the age of seventeen or eighteen with the instruments of knowledge and some elementary information in his hands, but without the chance of college or university training. Unless his interests are entirely confined to “scrummaging” or “scoring,” he will naturally take to some sort of reading—desultory enough it may be, but nevertheless not without some object and desire of self-improvement. In which direction is he to proceed? Before his feet countless paths diverge into widely remote and equally unexplored provinces of knowledge! Which path shall he take? Or shall he try them all, proceeding a little way in every direction without penetrating deeply in any one? To drop the metaphor, on what principle shall he choose the subject or subjects to which he is to devote some part of his scanty leisure? The answer is: Let him consult his own heart and the bias of his own nature, remembering that the object of his self-culture is not the acquirement of a mass of undigested information but the evolution of his highest faculties and of his best self. He is not to imagine that mere quantity of knowledge is any object. That is a vulgar mistake. A few lines of poetry lovingly read and

incorporated into his nature, in sweeter emotion and finer insight, is worth a whole literature studied in weariness of the flesh. I am anxious to insist upon the need of love, even in this sense, to sweeten our labour, because I know that from the want of it springs a good deal of pedantry and intellectual cant. So I will not ask you to take simply my word for it, but hear no less an authority than Shakespeare on this question. You will remember perhaps that in the “Taming of the Shrew” Tranio is represented as giving his master, Lucentio, some advice on the course of study he proposes to begin in Padua—

“ Mi pardonate, gentle master mine
I am in all affected as yourself
Glad that you thus continue your resolve
To suck the sweets of sweet philosophy.
Only, good mother, while we do admire
This virtue and this moral discipline,
Let’s be no stoics nor no stocks I pray.
Balk logic with acquaintance that you have,
And practise rhetoric in your common talk.
Music and poesy use to quicken you.
The mathematics and the metaphysics
Fall to them as you find your stomach serves you.
No profit grows where is no pleasure ta’en;
In brief, sir, study what you most affect.”

And Shakespeare, lest we should doubt his personal approval of the sentiment, makes Lucentio reply—

“ Gramercies, Tranio, well dost thou advise.”

We are to “study what we most affect.” As physical hunger is our best evidence that we require food, and are justified in eating, so our natural impulse, the spontaneous resultant of spiritual and intellectual forces, is our only security that we are not amassing useless information, but that what we learn, to quote Montaigne, is being “transchanged in us,” and that thereby we are being “nourished, augmented, and strengthened.” I have heard it related of a great English Professor that he had read every word of literary Latin ever written. I wish you to understand that this may be largely a *tour de force*, and mean very little real culture. Montaigne has insisted with great wit and weight on the primary object of study that it shall bring us some moral and spiritual betterment. “We are ever ready to ask,” he says, “hath a man any skill in the Greek or Latin

tongue? Can he write well? Doth he write in prose or verse? But whether he be grown wiser, which should be the chiefest of his drift, that is never spoken of. We should rather enquire who is better wise than who is more wise." In another place, "Except our mind be the better, our judgment the sounder, I had rather my scholar had employed his time in tennis; I am sure his body would be the nimbler." Shakespeare was aiming at the same truth when he wrote in "Measure for Measure"—

" Small have continual plodders ever won
Save base authority from others' books."

Let us then accept these two elementary principles that quantity is no criterion of the value of our studies, and that the direction of our self-culture is to be chiefly determined by our natural inclination.

But it may be asked: Is the sentiment of duty not to enter at all into our studies? Are we never literally "to scorn delights and live laborious days"? The answer is easy. Surely there is a great difference between purely perfunctory and grinding toil at a subject for which the student feels he has no natural liking, and that labours of love which, though it be labour, is always lightened and sweetened by the sense that he is thereby developing his best and highest self and improving those talents—to use the good old scripture word—which the Almighty has made peculiarly his own. Are not the very pains of martyrdom, from one point of view, almost a self-indulgence? Indeed I think you will have no difficulty in distinguishing on any occasion between these two very different species of effort.

Let us assume then that a young man just starting in self-culture, and proceeding upon the principles I have described, decides to devote his leisure chiefly to literature. I will try shortly to give a little practical advice on the study of literature, which happens to be my own favourite subject. But at present I wish to consider whether our friend is to devote himself exclusively to the study he has chosen, or, if not, how far he is justified in ranging beyond the limits of that particular study for the purpose of general information and a wider horizon of sympathy. I do not deny that there are versatile people who can pass from literature to science or mathematics, and find almost equal pleasure in each of

these divergent paths. But I suppose minds of a strong literary bent do not generally flourish among the details of natural science or in the upper regions of pure mathematics. Are such people then justified in scientific or mathematical ignorance? I certainly think not. A man may have little taste or ability for original research, but may, nevertheless, with interest and profit, make himself master of the general results of scientific investigation. Indeed I am not sure it will not be worth his while to attain some proficiency, even in the detail, of some one branch of natural science, say geology or chemistry, in order to acquire sympathy with scientific method, and not be entirely out of touch with the most characteristic activity of our age. Conversely, of course, no scientific student can afford to dispense entirely with the pursuit of literature. I noticed a few days ago in an educational paper the remark that the "works of God, that is, stones and plants and animals, are better worth studying than the thoughts of men." These words seemed to me shallow and misleading. Shall we limit the divine creatorship simply to the material elements of the universe? Surely the best thoughts of the best writers are as truly the expression of the divine mind as the laws of evolution and gravity. The tendency of a too exclusively scientific training is to materialize our conceptions, to make us forget in the physical ancestry of man that intellectual and moral supremacy of his which the most enlightened scientists are beginning more and more to attribute not simply to natural selection, but to successions of a miraculous spiritual influx. If this be so, if it be true in Browning's words that—

A spark disturbs our clod
Nearer we hold of God

Who gives than of his tribes who take—

shall we disparage the divine thought which, through human genius, has incorporated itself in our loftiest poetry and our wisest philosophies? I would, therefore, say: Be as widely receptive as possible, and though you may be by nature more especially sensitive to certain influences than to others, do not imagine that the divine energy is exhausted in any one channel, but that it reveals itself in beauty as well as in truth, not only in the iron rigour of law but in the wisdom and pathos of the human heart.

(To be continued.)